



NASW

National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut

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**Legislative Program Review and Investigation Committee Hearing
March 7, 2014
Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 6517 and 6557**

Submitted by: Steven Skrebutenas, BSW, NASW-CT member Board of Directors

Good Evening members of the Legislative Program Review and Investigation Committee. My name is Steven Skrebutenas and I am a member of the Board of Directors of the National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter representing over 3,500 social workers across Connecticut. I am before you today in support of HB 6557 and 6517.

As mental health and addiction services receive much needed attention in our state, families, educators, Mayors and Legislators seeks ways to identify and treat those in our communities who are in need of treatment. As this committee is aware, in Connecticut, about eight percent of youth aged 12 to 17 have abused or become dependent on alcohol or illicit drugs, within the past year. I am sure this committee is also aware that our youth are not for the most part finding their drug of choice from a shadowy figure pictured on an episode of Law and Order, but simply opening the medicine chest and misusing and abusing what has been prescribed for them or another member of their family. According to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Adolescent Health in this same population, Connecticut has, 24 % who suffered for a sense of hopelessness / sadness, 8% have had depressive episodes, 8 % have had a Major depressive episode, 15 % have suicidal thoughts and 7 % have acted on those thoughts attempting suicide.

As a Social Worker, I have worked with consumers who have utilized specialized treatment for mental health and or addiction services. The consumers that I have worked with for the most part have been treated under their Medicaid benefits. I come before this committee to speak on behalf of the families with private insurance. Connecticut has had a comprehensive mental health parity law as an attempt to provide equal treatment for those who have the flu to those who have depression. When we, as the insured seek, medical treatment for the flu, we may make a phone call or visit our physician and without much thought, receive the treatment we seek. However, when a family member is in need of mental health and / or addiction treatments the insurance providers are mandating that consumers receive pre-authorization and family are routinely denied services under their medical coverage. The Bills that I urge support on will strengthen what is already in place in Connecticut. HB 6517 will strengthen the checks to ensure private insurers are following state and federal laws on health care parity. HB 6557 will help working families access the care they seek by making sure that the person who works for the insurance company has the expertise in adolescence psych and treatment for adolescent substance abuse. Consumers will also be able under this bill to be better informed of their right of appeal if denied treatment, through the promotion of Office of Healthcare Advocate. This bill also will put in place a needed way for physicians to set treatment goals for their patients by adding substance abuse as urgent care request thus overriding an insurance company's denial.

Social Workers in Connecticut assist consumers daily in making decisions that affect their lives, by passing HB 6517 and 6557 you will not only help Social Worker more effectively help our consumers but help working families across the state.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Skrebutenas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a stylized "K" and "B".

Steven Skrebutenas, BSW
Member Board of Directors
NASW / CT